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Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire

Summary

The present report, prepared pursuant to the provisions of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), is presented to the Council as the second country report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire. It covers the period from October 2006 to September 2007 and follows my first report (S/2006/835) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/7).

The report stresses that the prevailing state of insecurity in Côte d'Ivoire and the general breakdown in law and order and the administration of justice have resulted in a social environment in which the most basic rights of children are violated, including an alarming degree of violence against children at the community level. The report also notes that there is a persistent culture of impunity for crimes against children. Of the six categories of grave violations covered in the report, rape and other sexual violence against children is of particular concern. The report emphasizes the responsibility of the parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire to address violations in the context of their responsibility for the maintenance of security in the territories under their respective control.

The report acknowledges that significant progress has been made, both in dialogue with the parties to the conflict, and in the implementation of action plans by them to end the association of children with their armed forces. It also updates progress in the strengthening of the violations monitoring and reporting system and illustrates programmatic responses to the violations. The report makes a number of recommendations, including recommendations for the systematic consideration of issues concerning children throughout the implementation process of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement and in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phases. It also recommends the preparation of a national action plan to address sexual violence against children and greater commitment and action by the relevant authorities to redress impunity for crimes against children through the rigorous and timely investigation and prosecution of cases.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report, prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), covers the period from October 2006 to September 2007 and follows my first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/7). The report focuses on six categories of grave violations against children: (a) recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups; (b) rape and other sexual violence against children; (c) killing and maiming of children; (d) abduction of children; (e) attacks against schools or hospitals; and (f) denial of humanitarian access for children. The report illustrates the progress made in the dialogue with the parties to the conflict towards full implementation of the action plans to end the use of children in armed forces and groups. It also updates progress in the strengthening of the monitoring and reporting system and illustrates programmatic responses to violations in support of affected children in Côte d'Ivoire.

II. Political, military and social developments in Côte d'Ivoire

2. In December 2006, the Head of State of Côte d'Ivoire, President Laurent Gbagbo, made a public call for a direct dialogue with the leadership of the Forces nouvelles to resolve the conflict that began in September 2002. The acceptance of dialogue by the Secretary-General of the Forces nouvelles, Guillaume Soro, led to the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement on 4 March 2007. The Agreement has brought a new momentum to the peace process. It seeks to resolve the conflict by merging the Forces nouvelles and national defence and security forces through an integrated command centre and to replace the "zone of confidence" by a "green line" marked by United Nations observation points, which will gradually be reduced in number. The Agreement also provides for the re-establishment of State administration throughout the country; dismantling of the militias; disarming of the combatants and their involvement in public service programmes; and creating new institutional arrangements to implement these tasks, including a new transitional government. It is envisioned that the Agreement will be fully implemented by 4 January 2008 and will be followed by the organization of a presidential election. Under a supplementary agreement signed on 26 March 2007, President Gbagbo designated Guillaume Soro as the new Prime Minister. Mr. Soro is to remain in office until the holding of the presidential election. The Ouagadougou Peace Agreement does not, however, set a timeline for the election.

3. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement has suffered several setbacks, including the attempted assassination of Prime Minister Soro in Bouaké on 29 June 2007, delays in the identification process and the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, a growing rift within the main opposition parties, a climate of hostility towards impartial forces, ineffective redeployment of the administration, including prefects and magistrates, and failure to adhere to the deadlines set out in the Agreement. The unresolved inter-community tensions, particularly in the west of the country, exacerbated by land disputes and differing political affiliations, also remain a major cause of concern. These tensions have resulted in the mass displacement of communities, including a large number of children.

4. As indicated in my first report on children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835), children are among those who continue to bear the burden of the political crisis in the country. They have been deeply impacted by the destruction and deterioration of infrastructure and services, which have been compounded by poverty, insecurity, lack of funding and of skilled workers for the provision of key services. Many children lose their lives as a result of the acute deterioration of health services in most parts of the country. Ultimately, the timely resolution of the conflict is critical to securing the well-being of children of the Côte d'Ivoire.

5. While the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement does not make direct reference to children or to the protection of civilians, the United Nations must advocate to ensure that issues concerning children will be taken into full consideration throughout the implementation of the peace process and in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phases, as explicitly requested by the Security Council in its resolution 1765 (2007) on Côte d'Ivoire and its resolutions 1460 (2003) and 1539 (2004) on children and armed conflict.

6. Beyond the six categories of grave violations that constitute the central focus of the present report, there are numerous other challenges in securing the rights of children in a broader context. These include a basic lack of access to education for approximately 700,000 children, an increasing number of cases of infectious diseases, such as acute respiratory infections, diarrhoea, malaria, malnutrition and HIV/AIDS, and the consequent high number of orphaned children.

III. Incidents and trends of grave violations

7. The outbreak of conflict in 2002 led to two weeks of sustained fighting between rebel forces and Government troops, during which time many children were killed, maimed and orphaned. There were also some intense days of fighting between the parties in November 2004. For the most part the situation in Côte d'Ivoire since 2002 has been marked by sporadic outbreaks of intercommunal violence, particularly in the west of the country, fuelled mainly by land disputes and differing political affiliations. The prevailing state of insecurity since 2002, the general breakdown in law and order throughout the country and the lack of an administration of justice system, particularly in the north, have resulted in a social environment in which the most basic rights of children are violated, including an alarming degree of community-level violence against them. There also continues to be a prevailing climate of impunity, in particular for crimes against children.

8. During the reporting period there was an upsurge in the number of reported cases of rape, while reported killings and abductions have declined in number. There were no confirmed reports of attacks against schools or hospitals nor of any denial of humanitarian access to children by armed groups. Crimes committed against children, particularly rape, killings and abduction, are generally perpetrated by civilian criminals, who may include uncontrolled elements of the armed groups taking advantage of the insecure environment and the lack of law and order. There have been no confirmed reports of violations committed by armed forces and groups cited in my last report.

9. Even though the grave violations described hereunder have been committed predominantly in the context of the community-level violence and the general state of insecurity in Côte d'Ivoire following the weeks of fighting in 2002, the onus

remains on the parties to the conflict in the country to address these violations in the context of their responsibility for the maintenance of security in the territories under their control.

10. The specific incidents cited below are indicative of the nature and trend of violations against children in Côte d'Ivoire.

A. Recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups

11. During the reporting period, there was no substantiated evidence of the active recruitment and use of children by armed groups. The regular dialogue with parties to the conflict and the progressive stabilization of the political and military situation have led to a steady decrease in the association of children with armed forces and groups. It should also be noted that the United Nations has been able to monitor and verify compliance with action plan commitments on a regular basis.

B. Sexual violence

12. Although the majority of the most serious incidents of sexual violence occurred during the clashes of 2002 and 2004, rape and other grave sexual violence against children, especially girls, take place with alarming frequency. These violations happen throughout the country.

13. Despite the recommendations addressed to the Government and the Forces nouvelles to ensure the rigorous and timely investigation of such incidents and the prosecution of perpetrators contained in my previous report, greater commitment and efforts are still required to redress the culture of impunity for such crimes. In areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles, where the administration of justice system has not been functioning since 2002, no rape cases have been prosecuted. Meanwhile, in Government-controlled areas only a few of the cases reported to the police reach the courts, primarily because of the lack of timely and thorough investigation. Furthermore, the lack of awareness of their own rights, fears of social stigmatization and discrimination and of reprisals by perpetrators often discourage the victims and their families from pursuing cases.

14. The following indicative examples reflect the nature and trend of sexual violence:

(a) On 28 October 2006, a 13-year-old girl was allegedly abducted and raped by a man in the village of Béoué, in Bongolo. The matter was reported to the gendarmerie of Douékoué for investigation but no action has been taken;

(b) On the night of 20 December 2006, a 16-year-old girl was reportedly raped by two armed men in the village of Aoki Ndenou near the zone of confidence. The assailants were unidentified;

(c) In December 2006, two young girls were reportedly raped by an unidentified assailant in a rural area near Bouaké. In the same month a similar case was reported in Man. The alleged perpetrators were never identified;

(d) On 12 January 2007, a 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped in Bouaké by an unidentified assailant who put a rope around her neck and left her with scars;

(e) On 14 June 2007, a 16-year-old girl was allegedly raped by four men in Port-Bouet, Abidjan. The perpetrators were not identified. The parents of the child reported the matter to the police station of Port-Bouet for investigation.

C. Killing and maiming of children

15. While there has been a decline in reported cases of killings, children continue to lose their lives as a direct consequence of the environment of high insecurity and the breakdown of law and order and of institutions. The most immediate threat to the lives of children remains inter-community tensions and violence, with children often caught up in clashes at this level. Many of the killings are not investigated and the perpetrators are rarely identified. The killings are also often associated with other violations such as rape.

16. The following cases reflect the nature and trend of the killing of children:

(a) On 21 November 2006, the body of a 17-year-old girl was found on the outskirts of Bouaké, with signs that she had also been raped. The identity of the perpetrator/s is not known;

(b) On 20 May 2007, a 17-year-old girl was reportedly murdered in Yamoussoukro. A male suspect was arrested and charged, and the case is awaiting trial.

D. Abduction of children

17. The abduction of children is often associated with trafficking and forced prostitution. Owing to the prevailing insecurity throughout the country, particularly the absence of an administration of justice system in the north, perpetrators often go unpunished. It is critical that the Government of Côte d'Ivoire implement the multilateral agreement against trafficking in children, which was signed by 10 countries in the subregion in July 2005. The implementation of the agreement would help curb cases of abduction for purposes of child labour and other forms of exploitation.

18. The following cases reflect trends of abduction of children:

(a) On 1 December 2006, the police confirmed the disappearance of three children in Bouaké: the abduction of a 9-year-old boy and two children, aged 5 and 8 years old, who have been missing since September 2006. A delegation of mothers met later with the chief of staff of the Secretary-General of the Forces nouvelles to raise concerns over allegations of abduction in Forces nouvelles-controlled areas. In response, the Forces nouvelles made a televised appeal deploring the abduction of children and requesting anyone with relevant information to report it to the authorities;

(b) On 9 April 2007, an 11-year-old girl was reportedly abducted in Koumassi, in Abidjan. Five days later, the mother of the girl received an anonymous phone call confirming the abduction. The case was reported to the police in Youpougon for investigation;

(c) On 8 May 2007, the suspected abduction of two children, aged 4 and 8 years old, was reported in Odienné. Information on the case was broadcast on the local radio and the children were later found and returned to their families.

E. Attacks against schools or hospitals

19. There were no confirmed reports of attacks by parties to the conflict or armed groups on schools or hospitals during the reporting period.

F. Denial of humanitarian access

20. During the period under review, there was no systematic denial by parties to the conflict of humanitarian access to children.

IV. Follow-up on recommendations, dialogue and implementation of action plans

21. The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other members of the United Nations country team continue to collaborate in the implementation of key recommendations in my first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.5/2007/7). In this regard, significant progress has been made, in dialogue with the parties to the conflict, in the preparation and implementation of action plans to end recruitment and use of children in armed forces and groups, as requested by the Security Council in its resolutions 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict. These action plans provide for the identification of children, their release to child protection agencies, measures to prevent further recruitment and association and arrangements for access by the United Nations for compliance, monitoring and verification.

22. The United Nations has worked closely with national counterparts, in particular the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme (renamed the Programme National de Réinsertion et Réhabilitation Communautaire in June 2007) in the identification and reintegration of the children associated with armed forces and groups.

A. Dialogue with militia groups

23. In my sixth report to the Security Council on children and armed conflict (A/61/529-S/2006/826 and Corr.1), I listed the four main militia groups in the west of Côte d'Ivoire for their use of children, namely, the Front pour la libération du grand ouest (FLGO); Mouvement Ivoirien de Libération de l'Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire (MILOCI); Alliance patriotique de l'ethnic Wé (APWé); and union patriotique de résistance du Grand Ouest (UPRGO). In September 2006, after a dialogue with the United Nations, these groups formally submitted action plans to end the association of children with their forces to my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire.

24. Since that time, UNOCI, UNICEF and the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme have worked closely with these groups on the implementation of their commitments under the action plans. In January 2007, the UNOCI child protection adviser held a meeting with the militias under the auspices of representatives of the national programme in Abidjan to agree on implementation modalities, including the designation by the militias of focal points to support the process. In subsequent meetings held jointly with UNICEF, the leadership of the groups reconfirmed their commitment and outlined their requirements for technical support for full implementation of their obligations.

25. In April 2007, the designated militia focal points, in collaboration with the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and UNICEF, began the process of the identification of children associated with their forces in Guiglo, Toulépleu, Bloléquin, Tai, Zagné, Duékoué and Bangolo. The 10-day exercise led to the registration of 204 children, including 84 girls, all of whom are now being assisted through UNICEF programmes, for which the United Nations is providing ongoing compliance, monitoring and verification.

26. There have been specific challenges in this process with the militias, stemming primarily from the fact that the combatants and associated children are not always based in military camp settings but are often dispersed and living on a day-to-day basis within their communities and their family settings. This peculiarity has made the identification and reintegration of children a technically complex and resource intensive process.

B. Dialogue with the Forces de défense et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles (ex-Forces armés des forces nouvelles)

27. On 20 December 2006, the UNOCI child protection adviser held a meeting in Bouaké with the leadership of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles, to disseminate my annual report on children and armed conflict, including the annexed list of violating parties (A/61/529-S/2006/826 and Corr.1), and my first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Security Council.

28. The leadership of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles objected to the continued inclusion of the group on the list of violating parties, arguing that it has made efforts to comply with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), including the preparation of an action plan to end the association of children with its forces. The leadership also reiterated its position that it does not have a policy of recruiting children, although some children may be found around its military camps where they may interact with combatants while in search of basic assistance, such as food. The leadership renewed its commitment to the full implementation of the commitments under the action plan that was agreed upon with the United Nations and addressed to my Special Representative in Côte d'Ivoire in November 2005.

29. On 26 January 2007, the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles submitted a letter to UNICEF requesting support to complete the implementation of the action plan. Following that request, on 15 March 2007 an agreement was signed between the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and UNICEF whereby UNICEF would provide logistical support to facilitate the

identification and demobilization of all children still associated with the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles. In June 2007, UNICEF transferred the requested support to the national programme, including 10 motor-cycles intended to enable the child protection focal points of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles to travel to the different military zones and identify the remaining children. Under the action plan the role of the designated focal points consists of: (a) the provision of child rights and protection training to commanders and troops, especially regarding recruitment and the use of children, in line with the Principles and Guidelines on the protection and the integration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups (the Paris Principles), (b) the identification of all children associated with Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles forces; and (c) the release of all identified children to UNICEF.

30. On 14 August 2007, the head of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles submitted a report on progress in the implementation and finalization of the action plan to my Special Representative in Côte d'Ivoire. In the final implementation phase, 85 children were identified, including 27 girls. It is anticipated that these children will be released to UNICEF by the end of August. In addition, there are 1,200 children already benefiting from UNICEF programmes for reintegration. The United Nations continues to verify compliance, including regular monitoring of the military zones under the control of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles.

31. At the request of UNICEF, the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles focal points have also identified other vulnerable children, including street children and orphans in areas under their control. Altogether, 325 street children, including 131 girls and 30 orphans, have been identified for assistance under UNICEF programmes. The Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles has also proposed the organization of working sessions on the subject of the protection of children with the humanitarian community in order to better address the situation of children in areas under their control.

Addressing the detention of children in areas under the control of Forces nouvelles

32. As indicated in my previous report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835), a major concern remains the absence of an administration of justice system in areas controlled by the Forces nouvelles. In March 2005, UNOCI engaged the leadership of Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles in a dialogue with the aim of ensuring that children are not held in detention for extended periods of time in the absence of a system for the administration of justice. In response, the leadership issued a command order to all Forces nouvelles police and military officers instructing that there be an end to the detention of children in areas under their control, pending restoration of a system for the administration of justice. Since my last report, the command order has been successfully implemented, with regular monitoring by the United Nations of prisons and detention facilities in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles in order to ensure that no children are incarcerated. The United Nations has also continued to widely disseminate the command order.

C. Lessons learned in dialogue for action plans

33. There is an ongoing review to determine some of the key lessons learned in the process of dialogue with the parties to the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire and the utilization of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005) and the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict as tools in this process.

34. Further information is being prepared in this regard, including analysis of the following critical aspects:

(a) Dissemination of information to parties to a conflict and to relevant United Nations entities and other child protection actors about Security Council resolutions, conclusions and recommendations;

(b) Complementarity, coordination and division of labour among United Nations actors to ensure that monitoring, reporting and dialogue with parties to a conflict on violations does not endanger ongoing programmes for children;

(c) Identification of credible interlocutors within armed groups who have the necessary authority to engage in dialogue and implement action plans;

(d) Ensuring the availability and timeliness of resources, and that institutional arrangements are in place to receive children as action plans are implemented.

V. Strengthening the monitoring and reporting mechanism and child protection training

35. The National Task Force on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism, co-chaired by the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the UNICEF country representative and consisting of all relevant members of the United Nations Country Team, has been fully operational since September 2006 to support the implementation of Security Council resolution 1612 (2005). The UNOCI child protection capacity has been strengthened with the approval of 14 additional child protection posts to monitor, train and report on peacekeeping personnel. The UNOCI Child Protection Section has now deployed in seven locations throughout the country, namely Abidjan, Bouaké, Odienné, Korhogo, Bondoukou, Duékoué and San-Pédro.

36. The Child Protection Section is working closely with the mission's Human Rights Section, military observers and other peacekeeping personnel, United Nations agencies and other child protection partners to systematically monitor violations against children and conduct awareness-raising and capacity-building at the community level in order to enhance prevention of practices harmful to children. Information collected on a daily basis is screened and fed into a database and reports are compiled on a bimonthly basis by the Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting. During the reporting period, UNICEF trained 24 representatives of local non-governmental organizations on data collection and is currently supporting the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs in establishing a national child protection database to serve as a tool for situation analysis and as an early warning system.

37. The monitoring of the behaviour of United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel has also been strengthened, with the timely investigation of

allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in conformity with the Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13 and the Organization's "zero tolerance" policy in this regard. The UNOCI Child Protection Section has established close collaboration with Save the Children Sweden to deliver ongoing training for peacekeeping personnel.

VI. Programmatic response to violations

38. The United Nations country team and non-governmental organizations have access throughout the country and are implementing a range of programmes to address grave violations and provide for the basic needs of children, community-level awareness raising and support and capacity-building for national authorities.

39. A total of 2,365 vulnerable children are currently benefiting from UNICEF programmes. These programmes are conducted in collaboration with local partners and agencies, including the World Food Programme (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as UNOCI and the World Bank. Activities include psychosocial counselling and assistance, with reintegration into school and vocational training. The International Rescue Committee, in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Save the Children and UNICEF, is also running programmes that benefit 500 self-demobilized children associated with armed forces and groups in areas under the control of the Forces de défence et de sécurité-Forces nouvelles. Of these children, 400 are attending informal vocational training centres while 100 have returned to school.

40. The reintegration of children affected by the conflict will require short-, medium- and long-term programmes backed by adequate resources. In particular, it is critical to ensure follow-up and monitoring mechanisms to mitigate the danger of children rejoining armed groups. Ongoing efforts include the development of projects for vocational training centres throughout the country for former children in armed forces and groups, an initiative of the UNOCI disarmament, demobilization and reintegration Section in consultation with UNICEF. There are also ongoing efforts to mobilize the required resources within the framework of the inter-agency coordination group on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which consists of key donors in that field.

41. Even though the World Bank programme has been suspended since 2004 due to non-payment of debt arrears, the organization has continued to finance various pilot activities in support of vulnerable populations. Working in collaboration with UNICEF and local non-governmental organizations, the Bank has assisted over 500 children in making the transition from living in military camps back to school or to vocational training. Since the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement, the World Bank has been working with the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to prepare a debt clearance plan, amounting to some $120 million, in support of its crisis recovery plan. One of the major components will be aimed at economic reinsertion of youth at risk, in particular those associated with armed groups. Some $40 million will be used to support training, vocational and job-creation programmes for young people.

42. WFP continues to provide critical nutritional support to all categories of vulnerable children. In 2006, the organization assisted some 840,936 children, including through an extensive school feeding programme, targeting, inter alia, demobilized children in armed forces and groups, war and HIV orphans, street children and separated children. In 2007, WFP began a new long-term relief and recovery programme, providing food assistance to 1,394 children associated with armed groups, 500 child victims of trafficking and 500 child victims of sexual abuses, in support of the child protection workplan run jointly by UNICEF and the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. WFP will also assist 3,000 HIV orphans.

43. UNICEF focuses on preventive and response interventions to address sexual violence, including through an awareness-raising campaign; training of health, social and judiciary personnel; creation of community protection networks; and provision of psychosocial, medical and legal assistance. Since 2006, UNICEF has funded the rehabilitation of 60 schools in Bouaké, Korhogo, Bondoukou, Man, Odienné and San-Pédro, as well as 16 health facilities, mainly in Forces nouvelles-controlled areas. In 2007, UNICEF assisted the Ministry of Family and Social Affairs in the rehabilitation and reopening of the social centres closed or damaged during the crisis. In support of UNICEF activities, UNOCI has approved the rehabilitation of 27 schools and 8 health centres through its quick-impact projects for the fiscal year 2006-2007.

44. Non-governmental organizations such as Save the Children Sweden have focused on protection and assistance in the context of education initiatives. Major programme activities include school rehabilitation, distribution of school kits, training of teachers and school management committees and the participatory development of protection measures for children. In 2006, some 14,500 children benefited from such programming, with 30,000 expected to benefit in 2007. Save the Children Sweden works with 70 community-based child protection committees and 57 children's groups and has extended its support to the Government by providing training to 27 social workers as trainers on child rights and protection. Save the Children UK runs similar programmes in western Côte d'Ivoire, and has supported the reintegration of former child soldiers from armed forces and groups. The organization has undertaken an extensive child rights and protection awareness-raising campaign and training for local non-governmental organizations, child protection committees, children's clubs and military and police personnel. The International Rescue Committee has focused on sexual and gender-based violence, including through community awareness-raising campaigns and the establishment of referral mechanisms to provide services for victims.

45. Programmatic responses to assist children affected by armed conflict have been hindered by delays in the redeployment of the administration in areas under the control of the Forces nouvelles. Civil servants often lack the confidence to return to these areas for safety and security reasons. The restoration of the administration of justice system would help in the efforts to protect children, restore confidence among government workers and ultimately expedite the full redeployment of the administration.

National commission for children affected by armed conflict

46. In order to ensure full consideration for children's concerns in the implementation of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement and throughout the peace

process, the United Nations has been engaged in dialogue with the Government on the formation and possible establishment of a national commission for children affected by armed conflict. Such a commission would represent a nationally owned institutional platform for child protection, ensuring prioritization of children in national institutions and processes, including adequate resource allocation. The efforts of such a commission would be supported by the United Nations and other international child protection actors.

VII. Recommendations

47. I urge all relevant parties, as a matter of priority, to implement the recommendations of my first report on the situation of children and armed conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (S/2006/835) and the subsequent conclusions and recommendations of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict (S/AC.51/2007/7). I request my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire, in close collaboration with the United Nations country team, to continue to ensure effective follow-up to Security Council resolutions on children and armed conflict, including further strengthening of violations monitoring and reporting, and to ensure a coordinated response to this issue.

48. I remain deeply concerned about the prevailing culture of impunity for violations against children. I call upon the relevant authorities to undertake and demonstrate concrete measures to address this concern, including rigorous and timely investigation of incidents and the prosecution of perpetrators.

49. I welcome the measures taken by the Forces nouvelles and the militia groups to cooperate with the United Nations and the national disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme in the full implementation of the action plans agreed upon with the United Nations in November 2005 and September 2006, respectively, to end the association of children with their forces. I call upon the parties to adhere to these commitments and to continue to grant the United Nations unhindered access to their military zones for verification. I urge the relevant United Nations actors to continue to systematically monitor and report on compliance and to prepare lessons learned and best practices on the dialogue and action plan process.

50. I remain deeply concerned about the prevalence of sexual violence, especially violence against girls in Côte d'Ivoire, and urge the Government, as a matter of urgent priority, to prepare a national action plan to address this issue. Such a plan may include a concerted awareness-raising campaign; training and capacity-building at the national and community levels for enhanced protection and victim assistance; and rigorous and timely investigation and prosecution of crimes of sexual violence. The United Nations and donors should support the Government in the preparation and implementation of such an action plan.

51. I welcome the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreement and call upon all relevant parties to ensure that issues concerning children are taken into full consideration throughout the implementation of the Agreement and in the post-conflict recovery and reconstruction phases. I encourage the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, with the support of the United Nations, to develop and establish appropriate institutional arrangements to ensure that children are prioritized in the peace reconstruction and development processes.